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ABSTRACT

Speculative prediction of the elementary school program of the future can be derived from current trends, promising directions, the accumulating body of theory and research, and demands of society. In the area of communications, multimedia and multisensory communication will replace teacher talk as the primary, one way channel. Formal curriculum will be replaced by commitment to each child's program. Evaluation will function as a mechanism for gathering feedback information to be used to guide and adjust the variables of the learning environment. Instruction will consist of cooperatively selected experience ranging from individual self instruction to mass instruction in groups of from two to several hundred. As children participate more directly in some of the activities of the community and as community involvement in the school increases, currently existing gaps in perception and expectation will be narrowed. The school will retain the aim of individual participation in the greater society, but will approach that purpose through the release of human potential, not the challenging of human potential. Educators will apply technology where the end result will be more efficient and effective learning and increased opportunity for person-to-person transactions. (JS)

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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF THE LATE '70's

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With some minor exceptions, the most striking characteristic of the elementary school in 1969 is its uniformity. The vast majority of American children progress through grades in self-contained classrooms and are taught by one teacher per year. The curriculum consists of an orderly arrangement of standard school content areas presented in a general sequence agreed upon by most teachers and educational decision-makers.

A child in grade three may travel 3,000 miles across this country and encounter the same textbock and nearly the same instructional setting as in his previous school. All children study science, mathematics, social studies and language. They also engage in activities drawn from art, music, physical education and any of several minor disciplines. Evaluation of progress in elementary school relies largely on cognitive assessment measures, most of them testing simple recall of content more than higher level processes. Success in the elementary school consists of accomplishing most of those tasks selected by the school as evidence of achievement.

The winds of change have always been present in the American elementary education program and will likely continue to influence that program. However, for the past ten years or so, those winds have shown a high degree of

variability in both direction and intensity. The launching of a satellite resulted in a typhoon in the sciences and mathematics. The failure of children of the poor blew dollars and ideas into slum schools. The demands of colleges breathed higher content expectations into elementary classrooms. And such a list could continue. Suffice it to say that the elementary school has never been going so many directions at once for so many different reasons, and with various facets progressing at differing rates.

The projections which follow are derived from current trends, promising directions, the accumulating body of theory and research, the demands of society, and the biases and hopes of the writers. Taken together, the projections become a speculative prediction of the elementary school program of the future. The projections are at best hypotheses subject to confirmation, rejection, or modification during the next decade. The projections are clustered around seven organizing themes, arranged alphabetically.

Communications

The future elementary school will lose the present preoccupation with skill-level expectations and will immerse the child in experiences which stimulate thought development,

idea clarification, and the direct quest of mutual understanding. The particulars of syntax will become secondary as the structure of the thought being transmitted comes to the fore. Multi-media and multi-sensory communication will replace teacher talk as the primary, one-way channel.

Curriculum

The formal curriculum of the future elementary school will be conspicuous by its absence. The notion of the school program will be replaced by commitment to each child's program. Sequence, priority, content, process, and continuity will become concepts with even more vital roles in the selection and planning of the learning experiences for each child. Experiences in the future elementary school will become smooth and continuous and lose their fragmented and discrete character.

At any point, cooperative curriculum decisions will be guided by the total development attainment of the child and the interpretations made of goals of school and society. The aggregate result will be socially relevant, immediately satisfying, and as rich and varied as the children participating.

Evaluation

In the elementary school of the future evaluation will be systematic, continuous and broad. The utility of evaluation will be measured in terms of diagnosis and prescription, and will not rely on singular numerical measurements. Evaluation will function as a mechanism for gathering feedback information which will be used to guide and adjust the variables of the learning environment. In effect, evaluation will become a general and comprehensive study of these variables.

Assessment of overt and covert behaviors, emotional and physiological factors, and motives and attitudes will assume importance along with the cognitive development of the child. The child, his parents, and the school will be continually appraised of direction and rate of change in any or all of these variables.

Instruction

Instruction in the future elementary school will consist of cooperatively-selected experiences ranging from individual self-instruction to mass-instruction in groups of from two to several hundred. Self-initiation will become central in the instructional process and the school

will provide the instructional resources. The degree and amount of social interaction among adults and children will increase as routine and peripheral activities are either eliminated or handled more efficiently.

Participation

The elementary school will cease to exist as a generally separate institution adjacent to the larger society. The need for a physical facility called a school, where almost all "learning" takes place, will be seriously challenged. As children participate more directly in some of the activities of the community, and as the community involvement in the school increases, currently existing gaps in perception and expectation will be narrowed.

The concerted effort of professional school personnel, parents, and members of the community will develop a sense of unity and consistency in the education of children. The elementary school will serve the greater community and, in turn, will be served by that community with increasing cooperative interaction.

Purpose

The purpose(s) of the elementary school have generally been stated in terms of the development of individuals

for participation in the greater society. These purposes have been translated into goals which reflect the notion of conformity and similarity as primary expectations for children. In the late 1970's the purpose of the elementary school will retain the aim of individual participation in the greater society, but will approach that purpose through the release of human potential, not the channeling of human potential. The release of human potential will be translated into activities which develop the uniqueness of each individual, rather than attempts to make all students alike.

Technology

The educators will have attained a sophistication in the selection and utilization of technology during the 1970's which will allow for rational and defensible use of the hardware and software. Educators will be asking industry for particular devices and procedures to meet objectives stated by educators. There is no question as to the growing role of technology as a supplement (not substitute) to the human interaction aspects of elementary education. Educators will apply technology where the end result will be more efficient and effective learning and increased opportunity for person-to-person transactions.

The elementary education program will not be the sole purveyor of technological education, and the broadened availability of home-based technological devices will be used to further supplement the education of the child.

The prospective elementary school of the late 1970's will have variability as its most striking characteristic. However, variability will not be interpreted as a lack of agreement, confusion, or chaos. Rather, the variability will simply reflect the variability of the clients of the school program. There will probably be more universals and more general agreement among educators, parents, and the society than currently available. Those universals will come from the growing research base upon which the education of children in elementary school will be predicated. The expected result will be children happy in and capitalizing on their uniqueness while growing up with an increasing sense of community with the extra-school society.

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